

THREE REASONS TO REJECT PERFORMANCE-BASED RELIGION

Galatians 4:8-31

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. What's the difference between all the religions of the world and Christianity?
2. All other religions teach that good people good to heaven. Christianity teaches that forgiven people go to heaven.
3. All other religions are based on performance. Christianity is based on faith.
4. All other religions rely upon what man must do to get to heaven. Christianity relies upon what Christ has done to get us to heaven.
5. All other religions are performance-based. They are based on performance; effort; merit; good works. Christianity is faith-based. It is based on faith in what Christ has done on our behalf.
6. This is not new. Back in the first century, when Christianity was just getting started, the apostle Paul wrote an entire letter devoted to this subject. Paul started several churches in Galatia, and he taught the people that salvation is by faith, and not by works. But when he left, false teachers, called Judaizers (Gal 2:14), came in and told the Galatians that it was not enough to have faith in Jesus to go to heaven. You also needed to become Jewish – commit to all of the Jewish laws and customs in the Old Testament. They tried to combine performance-based religion faith-based religion. It's necessary to believe, but also to keep the law. In response, Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians to correct this heresy. The main point of the entire letter is Sola Fide, which is a Latin phrase that was coined during the Protestant Reformation that means "faith alone." By the 1500s AD the Roman Catholic Church had drifted into performance-based religion. Like the Judaizers of the first century, they too taught a combination of performance plus faith. It is necessary to believe in Jesus, but if you die with any sin in your life, you must go to purgatory until you achieve perfect righteousness. In protest, the Protestant Reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin cried out, "Sola Fide! Faith alone!" Salvation is

- not by works; it is by faith alone. We don't earn heaven; we receive it by faith in Christ, who paid the penalty for our sins on the cross. We are justified, or declared righteous by God the judge, by faith in Christ, not because of our performance.
7. You see, the Galatians had started out with true Christianity – faith-based religion, but now they were slipping back into performance-based religion. Did you know that the same thing can happen to us? Just as the Galatians were slipping back into performance-based religion, and just like the Roman Catholics slipped back into it, it is possible for us to slip back into it as well. And when you fall into performance-based religion, you run into all sorts of problems. You lose your freedom in Christ, your joy and peace in Christ, and you can possibly miss out on heaven if it turns out you never embraced faith-based religion in the first place.
 8. So, in Galatians 4:8-31, Paul gives three reasons to reject performance-based religion.

II. **3 REASONS TO REJECT PERFORMANCE-BASED RELIGION**

1. It is futile.

- i. *Galatians 4:8-11* “8 But in the past, since you didn't know God, you were enslaved to things that by nature are not gods. 9 But now, since you know God, or rather have become known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elements? Do you want to be enslaved to them all over again? 10 You are observing special days, months, seasons, and years. 11 I am fearful for you, that perhaps my labor for you has been wasted.”
- ii. Paul says, “Before your salvation, you worshiped idols who could not help you. And now, you are relying upon laws that cannot help you.”
- iii. Before for Christ they were “enslaved to things that by nature are not gods.” They worshiped idols. They were polytheists, worshiping many gods. But in reality, they were not true gods. They were just pieces of wood or stone that had no power to actually save or help. In other words, their worship of false gods was futile.

- iv. But now, they have fallen into a different kind of futility. Now they are relying upon the law to get to heaven. The example Paul gives is that they were observing the Jewish calendar – days refers to the Sabbath; months refers to new moon festivals; seasons refers to the Jewish feasts such as Passover; and years refers to the Sabbath and Jubilee years. But that’s not all. Paul mentions other Jewish laws that they were relying upon, such as circumcision (5:2), and eating a kosher diet (2:11-14). And Paul calls these rules “the weak and worthless elements.” They are weak and worthless because they cannot save. They can’t get you to heaven.
- v. So, before Christ the Galatians were enslaved by the futility of idolatry. And now, they are abandoning Christ and turning to the futility of performance-based religion. Both are futile, or pointless, because they can’t save. They can’t get you to heaven.
- vi. Why is performance-based religion futile? Why is it pointless? Why can’t you get to heaven by being good enough? Because nobody is good enough. To earn your way to heaven, you have to be perfect, and nobody is perfect. Nobody has loved God and neighbor perfectly. We have all fallen short. All of us deserve God’s wrath, not heaven. Therefore God sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins, paying our penalty, so that we could be forgiven and go to heaven. Therefore our salvation is not based on our performance, but on Christ’s performance on the cross.
- vii. Christianity is not a religion for good people. It is a religion for people who admit they are sinners, who admit that they deserve God’s wrath, and who cry out for forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ.
- viii. One time a rich young man asked Jesus what he needed to do to go to heaven. Jesus said, “Keep all the commandments.” Why did Jesus say that? Did Jesus believe in performance-based religion? Well, technically you can get to heaven if you keep all the commandments; the problem is that everyone has failed. Jesus wanted the young man to see his need for a Savior. He wanted the young man to say, “Uh oh! I’ve failed. I’ve fallen short. Is

there any hope for me?” And then Jesus could share the gospel with him. Instead, the young man surprisingly claimed that he had perfectly kept all the commands. So, Jesus told him this. “Sell all your possessions, give the money to the poor, and come and follow me.” Why did Jesus tell him that? Jesus wanted to show the young man that not only had he failed to keep all the commandments, he failed to keep the first one. The first commandment is to worship only God. By commanding the young man to give away all of his money, Jesus was exposing the man’s worship of money. Jesus was saying, “Put me before your money.” But the young man rejected Christ and walked away in sadness. Not only had Jesus revealed the young man’s sin, but he revealed that the young man was not yet willing to give up his sin for Christ.

- ix. There are a lot of people today who are like the rich young man. They think they can earn their way to heaven because they think they are good. But you aren’t. You have to be perfect to earn heaven, and you aren’t. Just like the rich young man, you are a sinner. We are all sinners. We need a Savior. And we have one in the person of Jesus Christ. That’s the whole reason He came from heaven to earth. He earned heaven for us. Stop trying to earn heaven, and put your faith in the one who earned it for you.
- x. The first reason to reject performance-based religion is that it is futile. Let’s look at the second reason.

2. It painful.

- i. **Galatians 4:12-20** “12 I beg you, brothers and sisters: Become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have not wronged me; 13 you know that previously I preached the gospel to you because of a weakness of the flesh. 14 You did not despise or reject me though my physical condition was a trial for you. On the contrary, you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus himself. 15 Where, then, is your blessing? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. 16 So then, have I become your enemy because I told you the truth? 17 They court you eagerly, but not for good. They want to

exclude you from me, so that you would pursue them. 18 But it is always good to be pursued in a good manner—and not just when I am with you. 19 My children, I am again suffering labor pains for you until Christ is formed in you. 20 I would like to be with you right now and change my tone of voice, because I don't know what to do about you."

- ii. Now Paul goes back to the time when they first met. He says, "When we first met, you were extraordinarily generous to me. And you should get a blessing for that. But if you turn back to performance-based religion, then you get only pain."
- iii. Let's walk through his words.
- iv. *"12 I beg you, brothers and sisters: Become as I am, for I also have become as you are."*
 - 1. Paul says two things here:
 - a. First, "Become as I am." That is, rely upon Christ alone, and not good works for salvation.
 - b. Second, "For I also have become as you are." Just as the Galatians were Gentiles who did not follow the Jewish laws, Paul had also given up the Jewish laws.
- v. *"12c You have not wronged me; 13 you know that previously I preached the gospel to you because of a weakness of the flesh."*
 - 1. Scholars have an interesting theory for how Paul ended up in Galatia. He was on his first missionary journey with Barnabas and Saul. They made to the mainland from the island of Cypress. First they went to Perga, near the coast. But instead of staying along the coast, they traveled up to Antioch of Pisidia, which was up on a plateau. The road leading there was one of the most dangerous and difficult in the world. That's when Mark left Paul, and possibly the reason why. Why did Paul take this arduous journey up to Antioch Pisidia rather than stay and preach along the coast? Scholars believe that Paul had Malaria, and that he was trying to find relief by getting to a higher elevation. And while in Antioch of Pisidia he preached the gospel to the people there, the Galatians.

vi. *“14 You did not despise or reject me though my physical condition was a trial for you. On the contrary, you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus himself.”*

1. Back then both Jews and Gentiles viewed illness as a sign of displeasure of the gods. They would have been tempted to look down on Paul and reject his presence in their village. Instead, they took him in and cared for him. They treated him with amazing generosity.

vii. *“15 Where, then, is your blessing? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.”*

1. So Paul asks, “Where is your blessing, your reward, for treating me with such generosity? Your reward was the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is all about salvation by faith, and not by works. But if you turn to performance-based religion, you lose your reward. You lose the blessing that God had intended for you.”

viii. *“16 So then, have I become your enemy because I told you the truth? 17 They court you eagerly, but not for good. They want to exclude you from me, so that you would pursue them.”*

1. Paul now is talking about the Judaizers. The Jewish false-teachers who were trying to turn them into Jews. “They court you eagerly, but not for good.” They are trying hard to win you over, but not to something good. When you turn away from faith-based religion, you receive only pain.

ix. Performance-based religion leads to two painful emotions:

1. Uncertainty. You live in a constant state of uncertainty, of doubt, because you never know if you have done enough to go to heaven. It is very similar to the religion of Islam. Muslims believe that everything you do is recorded by two angels. An angel on your right shoulder records your good deeds, and an angel on your left should records all your bad deeds. When you die you stand before Allah and all your deeds will be read aloud. If your good deeds are greater than your bad deeds, you will be let into heaven. So,

Muslims never know at any given moment if their good deeds outweigh their bad. They never know if they have done good enough. You never know where you stand with God.

2. Fear. You live in a constant state of fear. Fear of what? Hell. Since you are uncertain if you have made the cut, you constantly fear dying and going to hell. This is was the experience of Martin Luther, the Protestant Reformer. He was a Roman Catholic Monk, and he lived in constant terror of hell. He was afraid that he would commit a mortal sin and then die before he had a chance to go to confession, or that he would commit a mortal sin and forget to confess it.
- x. But with Christ there is total freedom from uncertainty and fear. You don't have to be uncertain, because salvation is not based on your performance. It's based on faith in Christ. And you don't have to fear hell, because Christ has already taken your punishment.
- xi. The second reason to reject performance-based religion is that it is painful. Let's look at the third.

3. It is unbiblical.

- i. *Galatians 4:21-31* 21 Tell me, you who want to be under the law, don't you hear the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and the other by a free woman. 23 But the one by the slave was born as a result of the flesh, while the one by the free woman was born through promise. 24 These things are being taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai and bears children into slavery—this is Hagar. 25 Now Hagar represents Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. 27 For it is written,
Rejoice, childless woman,
unable to give birth.
Burst into song and shout,
you who are not in labor,

*for the children of the desolate woman will be many,
more numerous than those
of the woman who has a husband.,*

28 Now you too, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 But just as then the child born as a result of the flesh persecuted the one born as a result of the Spirit, so also now. 30 But what does the Scripture say? "Drive out the slave and her son, for the son of the slave will never be a coheir with the son of the free woman.", 31 Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of a slave but of the free woman.

- ii. Now Paul makes an argument from Scripture.
- iii. "21 Tell me, you who want to be under the law, don't you hear the law?"
 - 1. Paul is saying, "You who are relying on the law for salvation, don't you know what the law says? There is more to the law than the commands of Moses. The actual law, or Torah, consists of the first five books of the Bible, including the book of Genesis and the story of Abraham. Don't you know what the law says in Genesis?" And Paul is going to talk about Abraham's story.
- iv. Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael was the son of Hagar, a slave. And Isaac was the son of Sarah, a free woman. God promised Abraham that he would have many descendants, but his wife, Sarah, was unable to have children. So, she gave her slave Hagar to Abraham so that she could have children through Hagar. That's when Ishmael was born. So, Ishmael was born as a result of human effort. A few years later, God promised Abraham that he would have a son through Sarah, and Abraham believed God. When Isaac was born, Sarah was 90 years old, and Abraham was 100. So, Isaac was a miracle child. He was born because Abraham believed God's promise.
- v. Hagar represents those rely upon human effort to get to heaven. She represents performance-based religion. She represents Mount Sinai, where the law was given, and the earthly Jerusalem, which was filled with Jews who rejected Christ and were relying

upon the law. They are slaves to the law. Sarah represents those who have faith in the word of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are born not by human effort, but by faith in the word of God. They are free.

- vi. When Isaac was weaned at the age of three years old, Abraham gave a great feast. Ishmael was seventeen years old at the time, and he mocked Isaac. This caused Sarah to tell Abraham to kick Ishmael and his mother out of the family, and to not let Ishmael share in Isaac's inheritance.
- vii. In the same way, those who rely upon the law for salvation always persecute true Christians. However, in the end, they will not share in the inheritance of eternal life.
- viii. Paul said that all of this was written not just as history, but to teach us about God's plan of salvation. Salvation is not given to those who rely upon human effort, but to those who have faith in the word of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

III. CONCLUSION

1. As your pastor, I want to protect you from performance-based religion. It can steal your peace and joy. It can put you in bondage to unnecessary rules and regulations. And it can possibly keep you from eternal life if you never understood and believed the true gospel.
2. How do you know if you are flirting with performance-based religion?
 - i. You are relying upon good works for salvation. In other words, if I were to ask you, "Why should God let you to heaven?" what would you say? If you said it's because you are a good person, or you follow the ten commandments, or you try your best to live by the Bible, then that shows your faith is in your performance. Your faith is in your good works. The right answer is that God should let me into heaven because I have faith in Jesus Christ who paid for my sins on the cross.
 - ii. You are uncertain about your salvation. You lack assurance. Are you 100% certain that you will go to heaven tonight? If not, it's probably because you are relying upon good works to get to heaven, and there's no way to know for certain if you are good enough. Assurance comes from understanding the gospel. That

salvation is not based on anything we do. It's not based on whether we are good or bad. It's solely based on our faith in what Christ has done. When you realize that it's not about you, and it's all about Christ, your assurance will begin to grow.

- iii. You often worry about hell. If you are worried about hell, it's because you are afraid that God is going to punish you for not being good enough. For being bad. But the truth is that nobody is good enough. We are all bad. We all deserve hell. That's the whole reason for the cross. God sent Christ to be punished for our sins so that we can be forgiven and go to heaven. If you have faith in Christ, there's no need to fear hell.
3. So, here's how I want to close. If you fear hell, if you are uncertain about your salvation, then I encourage you to ask Christ to save you once and for all right now.
 4. How do you do that? A.B.C.
 - i. A – Admit you are a sinner, deserving hell, in need of a Savior.
 - ii. B – Believe that Jesus died for your sins and rose again.
 - iii. C – Call on Jesus to come into your life and be your Savior and Boss.